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Lack of Free Expression and Press Freedom as a Factor in the Political Crisis in Somalia

Dab nimaan ku guban, dambaskiisa kama cararo.
 'He, who has not been burnt with a fire, does not flee from its ashes.'
 Somali proverb

1. Introduction

The prime objective of this paper is to emphasise how the flow of information, freedom of expression as well as press freedom was ignored and how the Somali people were deprived their rights of freedom of expression during the reign of Siyad Barre.

I was myself one of the administrative staff in the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education, at Somali National University, in the years 1976-1981, during Siyad Barre's regime. Prior to my appointment as personnel director on June 20th, 1978, I was assistant chief librarian at the College of Education. During this period, my duties among others included ordering local and foreign newspapers and magazines. My experience of the system was that on several occasions, I found some part(s) of a page and/or even some whole pages of an issue were cut from the newspaper or magazine. The missing articles were obviously critical to the military regime in Somalia - the titles of them could still be read in the table of contents.

Secondly, I wish to speak of the number of students that could be registered at the Somali National University, the sole university in the country, with one thousand students per each academic year. The students were competing in the admission tests for their registration at the university. Unfortunately, the way the admission test was being handled was full of injustice. Those related to the authorities were given priorities, sometimes enrolled without admission tests, while keen students who came all the way from far regions found themselves unqualified or registered at faculties that did not match their choices.

The results, usually based on nepotism and misuse of power, were published in the local newspapers, and/or broadcast. The students could not talk back about their concerns and were unable to express their views freely. Either the party representative, based at the different faculties, or the National Security Service (NSS) members who had been registered as students in the different faculties as well to supervise and oppress the students, checked their activities.

The situation illustrated by the above remarks and many others based on my personal experience within the system lead me to undertake the research behind this paper. The Somali mass media is one of the virgin and least studied areas in the country.

The management and control of the media, as well as its functioning in practice, were determined by Somalia's particular political system during the 1970s and 1980s. Somali journalism was almost always muzzled by strict censorship imposed by the military rulers of the nation in their own interest.

This study will focus on Somalia during the 1970s and 1980s. Before that, the Somali people had enjoyed parliamentary democracy during the first post-independence years. Under the military rule, people who were denied access to the media and free expression used their old traditional poetry, folk media or oramedia. Despite all kinds of restrictions imposed on free

expression, poetic expression was always safeguarded and used by the public. The study will be in two parts; first we will examine under which circumstances journalists were working during the period in question, then we will take some poems as examples of how poets were able to circumvent the censorship in order to express criticism of the regime.

2. The state and the media

2.1. The notion of freedom of expression and press freedom

Within Islam, speaking out against injustices is not only the right but even the duty of individuals. The Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon Him) said: 'A word of justice uttered before an unjust ruler is the greatest of *jiḥād* (holy war)' (Kutub 1988:156-60).

As Mawdudi (1993) points out, the *amir* doesn't rule alone. His task is to administer his country, advised by the *shura*. The *shura* is a consultative council elected by the people specifically to assist and guide the *amir*, who remains in office only as long as he enjoys the confidence of the people and if that confidence is lost, he must relinquish his office. There must be channels for public opinion to make itself heard as citizens have the right to criticize the *amir* and his government.

However, that freedom of expression must be exercised in pursuit of righteousness, for propagating virtue, not for spreading evil, and as such is not only a right but an obligation. The Holy Qur'an describes the quality of the faithful in the following words:

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

They enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil. (The Holy Qur'an 9:71)

In contrast, describing the qualities of a hypocrite, the Qur'an says:

They enjoin evil, and forbid what is just. (The Holy Qur'an 9:67)

In an Islamic society, it would be unacceptable use this freedom of expression to undress a woman and take pictures of her to be displayed for the morbid pleasure of the public (Saleem 1993:94). It is obviously *haram* and against the Islamic moral code.

Within the Western tradition, the notion of freedom of expression is coupled with that of a free press. John Keane, in his book *The Media and Democracy*, quotes Thomas Erskine, Attorney General to the Prince of Wales, who said in 1792, in his famous defence of free speech and a free press:

'Every man may analyse the principle of his constitutions, point out its errors and defects, examine and publish its corruption, warn his fellow citizens against ruinous consequences.' (Keane 1991:4)

Thomas Jefferson, who in 1801 became president of the United States, wrote already in 1787:

'Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a Government without Newspapers, or Newspapers without a Government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.' (Quoted in Keane 1991:2)

2.2. The official attitude in revolutionary Somalia

Radio, in Somalia, was the most important medium of communication, as a large proportion of the population had access to a radio receiver. According to Col. Ismail Ali Abokor, ex-vice president of the Somali Revolutionary Council and Secretary of State for Information and National Guidance,

'Broadcasting plays a vital role in the world and particularly in developing countries. It provokes thought and helps form correct attitudes in a revolutionary society like the one in Somali Democratic Republic.' (Broadcasting Handbook).

In an interview in 1979 the Director of the Somali Broadcasting Department mentioned among the objectives of government broadcasting the following: *strengthening national co-operation; spreading the spirit of solidarity; dealing with social problems; advocating adherence to spiritual and moral values; evaluating, filtering, and disseminating ideas and aspirations of the national leaders; giving listeners a ready understanding of the aims of the socialist revolution; and explaining how the people fit into the overall system.*

From this scenario one can note that Somalia's media situation was similar to that of the Baltic countries during Soviet rule in the region. (Høyer *et al.* 1993:191)

During 1970, several laws were passed, setting up the National Security Service and restricting the rights of the citizens, and in 1972, judicial powers were conferred to the SRC (Horn of Africa, May 1990). Particular laws aimed at stopping any criticism of the state carried punishment of severe fines and/or up to ten or fifteen years of imprisonment (Mantovani 1973: 748-50), nor did the government hesitate to put these laws into practice (Horn of Africa, November 1990).

2.3. The Censorship Board

Originally, the censorship office existed within the Somali National Film Agency until 1985, and its role was to censor all commercial films and sort out the right films matching the Somali culture based on the Islamic religion. But in 1985, the censorship office was placed under the National Security Service (NSS), its duties were widened and it was made a cornerstone institution, *Faaf-reebka* 'the Censorship Board'.

It was made up of four sections: (1) the Audio-visual section which was assigned to screen all audio-visual materials; (2) the Information and literature section; (3) the Arabic publications section; and (4) the section for other foreign languages, to censor all publications in other foreign languages.

The Censorship Board had branch offices at the airport terminals, harbour terminals and at the borders, censoring all incoming and/or outgoing publications and recordings.

The Censorship Board imposed that all material of ordinary individuals who exchanged messages on tapes, or in some circumstances sent video-recordings of a family party, etc, to their relatives or friends living abroad, first had to be checked at the Censorship office and apply for 'mailing permission'. The tapes had to undergo a censorship process for 2-3 days, and if no anti-government criticism was found, they would then be authorised for mailing.

Foreign newspaper and magazine kiosks, like Samatars Bookshop and the two Italian newspaper kiosks in Mogadishu, had to follow the Censorship rules. The Censorship officers had to go through all the different foreign publications before they were sold publicly. Particular attention was given articles critical to the Somali government at the time. If they found criticism in any paper, they would take off these pages from that issue, after which it could be sold. Readers buying newspapers frequently found pages missing from his/her issue just bought from a kiosk; since the titles of the articles appeared in the contents, it was obviously understandable that the missing pages were critical to the government. Yet this became an accepted norm. (Interview with a former NSS officer)

At the SPA, two colonels from the NSS had been stationed, each heading a group of NSS officers assigned a specific task. One group was responsible for government publications, such as the Official Bulletin, passports, etc. The other group, sharing their duty with the Party Representative, was assigned to act as a 'proof-reader' to read at night time all materials meant to be published the next morning by the sole daily paper, *Xiddigta Oktoobar* 'The October Star', as well as the few other existing weekly and/or monthly magazines and periodicals. In fact, the NSS and Party Representative at the SPA acted as the main editors of all publications. There were no private publishing houses in the country, except Shariff

Aidarus's small publishing house in Shibis, Mogadishu, which produced only school exercise books, notebooks, calendars and invitation cards. Even when publishing these items, he had to take some samples to censorship and apply for publishing orders. (Interview with a former NSS officer).

3. The experiences of Somali journalists

To enrich my paper with testimonies and make it digestible to its readers, I am utilising some of my extensive interviews with Somali journalists, whom I met at the BBC to discuss their professional experiences and personal reflections on the question of free expression and press freedom during the dictatorial regime in Somalia. Most Somali journalists have worked at the Ministry of Information and National Guidance. It is interesting to observe their views on their life experience. One can easily see from these perspectives just how the flow of information in Somalia was restricted, and how the media was put under state control.

Somalia experienced a form of general oppression which covered the whole country, and which in turn had an effect on broadcasting. Somali journalists, particularly those in the Broadcasting Department, experienced strict censorship from the bosses, who in turn were under pressure from the national leaders.

The media censorship operated in two ways: one, if broadcasters announced a normal news item, which had been broadcast by the international radio stations, they would be accused of broadcasting that item. The other censorship was the strict control of press freedom in Somalia, as explained above.

I will here raise a few cases concerning the experiences of Somali journalists who have lived within the system.

Case 1:

Generally, Somali journalists were under strict control and were always given guidelines to follow. Mohamoud Abdi Du'ale, former head of Radio Mogadishu, tells his experience in the ministry. He had been told by the Minister of Information and National Guidance, that they can not tell any item that may harm the revolution, let it be a crash of an aeroplane or a coup that occurs somewhere in the World. Du'ale told the Minister:

'These are the main news we have to tell, if we could not tell them, you better close the station.' (LRC/Du'ale/09.01.96)

The blockade of the flow of information in Somalia was noticeable in the restrictions from the government high officials, including the head of state. President Siyad Barre himself did not like to hear international news. Du'ale explains the following:

'One day we were editing an item concerned with the establishment of the National Council and the introduction of a Constitution by President Moussa Traoré of Mali. The news was aired at 14.30 - at about 15.00, we all broadcasters and editors, including SONNA (Somali National News Agency) staff, were invited to the library of the Ministry of Information, where Siyad Barre was waiting to meet with us. He made a long speech in which he said:

'Moussa Taraore (Traore)! Moussa Taraore! What the hell with him? We don't care about Moussa Taraore.' (LRC/Du'ale/09.01.96)

Du'ale went on saying that during the cold war between the two superpowers in the 1970s and 1980s, Somalia's international relationships had shifted from socialist countries to the western countries. This phenomenon also had an impact on the media situation in Somalia, it worsened the pressures on the media. Du'ale, describing this phenomenon, said:

'The building of the Ministry of Information and National Guidance was located between the presidential palace and the headquarters of the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP). Therefore, if the Somali broadcasters broadcast something concerning Breshnev, the Presidential palace would ring and complain, and if they broadcast an item concerning the Western world, the SRSP would ring and criticise them of being pro-westerners.' (LRC/Du'ale/09.01.96)

Du'ale remembers well until today, that himself, Ahmed Ali Askar, Fiqi Buraale and others were assigned to check what songs could be played out for the public. One day they decided to play a song called *Hooyo* ('Mother') written by Hadraawi, who was in jail because of his previous poems critical of the government. Others in authority, however, stamped the *Hooyo* song with the word 'rejected'.

Hadrawi's poetry was seen as dangerous by Siyad Barre, because it carried a message to the listeners, warning them of the politicians playing patriots while intent on serving their own interests only. (Ahmed 1996: 106)

Radio Mogadishu's amplifiers on landrover vans moved around the city, warning the public not to listen to either BBC Somali Service or Radio Kulmis, a radio owned by a Somali opposition group, the SSDF (Somali Salvation Democratic Front). The NSS were put in full alert to arrest anyone listening to Radio Kulmis. Du'ale mentioning an incidence said:

'One day I came back from the office to my home, and I was told that my family was taken to the orientation centre in the area, accused by a lady servant of having listened to Radio Kulmis in our house. I, Du'ale, who was driving a Radio Mogadishu car with a monitor, came and told them: 'listening to Radio Kulmis is part of my job.' Radio Kulmis had been monitored and 12 copies were distributed; one copy for the President, one for Col. Geelle, Chairman of the National Security Court, one for the Head of Radio Mogadishu (myself) and one copy for the Head of SONNA.' (LRC/Du'ale/09.01.96)

Case 2:

Media in Somalia, and Somalia being a third world country, was considered by the Somali journalists to be under the most strict censorship, since Somali media served only the interests and the propaganda of the military regime in power at the time. Somali media had no other choice, but toeing to the government line. All Somali journalists, whether in programme production, news or comments, had accepted this norm. Henceforth, Somali journalists censored themselves. Any news item that might provoke and raise the public awareness, for instance, a news item that reported a people's uprising against their own government somewhere in the world was oppressed, for the government thought that the Somali people might follow the example.

Abdullahi Hassan Fadal, former TV deputy director, explaining the Somali media situation stresses:

'The only agreeable news in the country was news that kept up the relationship between the public and the government. Henceforth, the line was clear enough to the media people and it was obligatory to accept that norm of censorship. There were some Somali journalists who left their jobs or escaped from the country because of the lack of press freedom, and there were others who could not leave their jobs and just accepted the oppression, like myself, because they had no other choice. Everybody, from the Minister to the lowest position holder in the Ministry of Information and National Guidance adhered to the prescribed situation of silence.' (LRC/Fadal/11.01.1996)

Fadal also pointed out that usually instructions were given during the departmental directors' meeting. He explains:

'During the meeting of the heads of departments of the Ministry of Information and National Guidance, it was always suggested that Somalia had nothing to do with the news items from Paris or Nigeria, from the world in general. The news from the local districts was needed. The point was that the socialist revolutionary regime didn't want the Somali people to be conscious to what is happening in the world. Of course, the journalists were reading, listening, monitoring and editing, but they could not inform the public of the daily international events. Thus, the media in Somalia had lost its real valuable journalistic ethics.' (LRC/Fadal/11.01.96)

Case 3:

Censorship was part of routine oppression to every Somali journalist in his/her working spot. The journalists were not able to meet with and interview everyone whom they thought were newsmakers.

If the interview wasn't concerned with politics, then they were able to interview whom they wanted. But, if it was concerned with politics, the only interviewees were government ministers, director generals, military officers, etc.

Yusuf-Garaad Omar, former government newspaper and radio editor says:

'*Latashi* (consultation) was used for the term 'censorship'. If a government official gave a piece of information that might harm the government policy, the interviewer would consult with a chief editor. If he could not decide, then the matter went to the Director of Broadcasting. If the matter was still undecided then it went to the Minister, and if the Minister himself was unable to decide, he would consult with the President, who finally decided whether or not to air that piece of information.

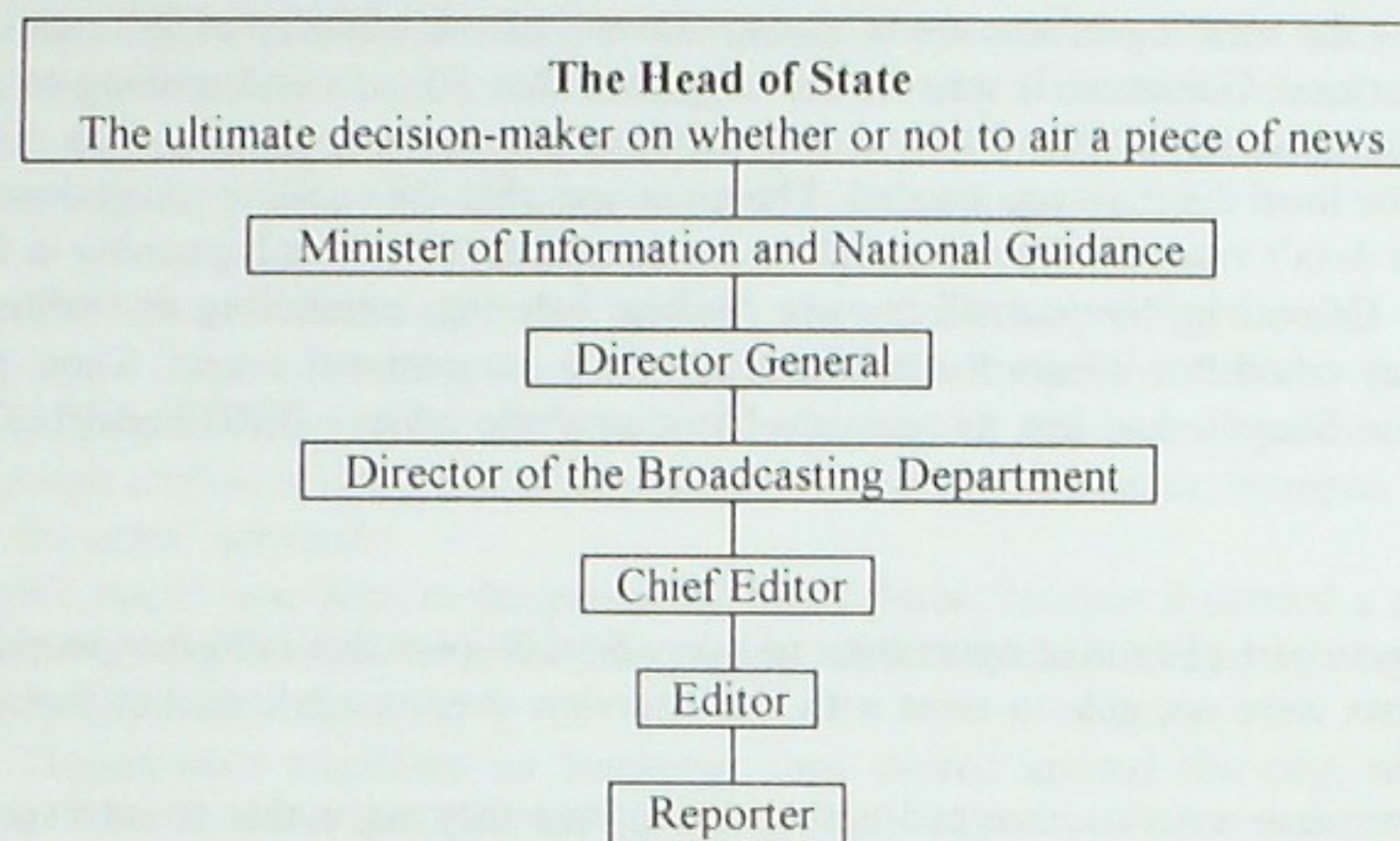
This was the chain of censorship within the Ministry of Information and National Guidance.' (LRC/Garaad/19.01.1996)

Due to the strict censorship on the flow of information (see fig. 1 below), the result was that news of local events could be heard from foreign media channels before the local ones. When this information had been heard from, for instance, the BBC Somali Service, the local editors had already known the item two, three days earlier. Yusuf Garaad gave the following example:

'One evening, while I was producing the news bulletin to broadcast at 17,00, a SONNA reporter from Bosaso reported that a ship was burning near the coast of Bosaso. I was not able to broadcast the ship item, because while discussing whether or not to broadcast, the clock stood at 17, 00 hrs. The news went out without it. At about 17.30 still working, we opened the BBC Somali Service which broadcast the news of the burnt ship, because a reporter from SONNA had reported to BBC. After the long consultation hours, I was told to broadcast the ship item.' (LRC/Garaad/19.01.1996)

Yusuf-Garaad came up with a Somali proverb to emphasise the media situation: *War la qabaa xiiso ma leh* 'Heard news is worthless' (LRC/Garaad/19.01.1996). If a news item is not aired at the proper time, it becomes dead news. Therefore, media in Somalia experienced a deadlock situation that should have been corrected. If a reporter reports on an event, and the event really has taken place, let it be aired out, regardless of the liking or disliking of the news by any government in power at the time.

Figure 1. The chain of news censorship in Somalia



Not even the simplest form of government criticism was allowed, and certainly not from state-run media. Somali journalists lacked the authority to report anything that went wrong in public services. Yusuf-Garaad giving an example points out:

'The late Abdulkadir Ali Iidle, who produced the daily Radio Show programme at 13.30, criticised some social problems, such as transportation problems, fuel shortages and how education in Somalia had fallen from its peak. The item concerned with the education in Somalia was aired one day at 13.30 hrs. After a short while, the Minister of Education at that time, Abdullahi Mohamoud Mire (one of Barre's sons-in-law) went to Radio Mogadishu and banned it from being sent out again at the evening repetition of Bandhiga Raadiyaha (radio show).' (LRC/Garaad/19.01.1996)

When President Siyad Barre, in 1986, had been wounded in a car accident between Afgooye and Mogadishu, he was flown to Saudi Arabia for medical care. Somali journalists were telling untruthful information to the public, such as the president was quite well, he met with some Saudi officials and the Somali community in Saudi Arabia, while at the same time the journalists were hearing from their own audience that the president was unconscious and in a coma.

The late Colonel Mohamed Omar Jeas, the Minister of Information and National Guidance at that time, who had accompanied the President to Saudi Arabia, was interviewed by the BBC Somali Service. He was asked about the health conditions of the President. He said in the interview: 'President Siyad has been wounded in a car accident, his arm got broken, etc.' He was asked again whether he could eat something or not. He told to the BBC: 'Today he has drunk a cup of milk'.

Garaad as a young editor realized

'...from the interview of my minister, that the broadcasters were reading propaganda to the Somali people and were not truthful, fair, objective and faithful. The words of the Somali Minister of Information had contradicted what Radio Mogadishu was telling. The Somali Information Minister, if, and only if, he gives an interview, he should give it to the national radio. If BBC Somali Service

broadcast an item concerning the Somali President's health situation, it should have to refer to Radio Mogadishu, although both stations address to Somali population.' (LRC/Garaad/19.01.1996)

Case 4:

According to Adan Nuh Dule, a programme producer, in general, censorship in Somalia had mainly effected foreign news, because the local news was merely the repetition of what the government officials said. Journalists were in a situation in which they could not analyse or comment on any issue; thus, they simply repeated what the officials said. The editorial judgement was to worry about what journalists write/edit, whether their productions were according to the military government's line. Adan Nuh Dule, a programme producer took a case in his experience, as an example:

'The Secretary General of the Arab League had resigned from his position, while on official visit in Somalia. As I was broadcasting the news bulletin at 17.00, I mentioned the resignation of the Arab League Secretary General in the headlines. The Minister of Information and National Guidance who was in the People's Assembly heard it. He thought that it should not be broadcast, and immediately rang to the studio manager and ordered them not to go into details. I was then instructed by the studio manager to skip the resignation item and to read the following item.' (LRC/Nuh/19.01.1996)

4. The countermoves by Somali poets

In a Somali children's game, a group of kids form a circle holding hands. In the centre there is a child, whose task is to sneak out and slip through the human wall. Somali adults found themselves playing a real life game with authorities intent on stifling their free press and their freedom of speech.

Like the kid in the middle of the circle devising ways of extricating himself from the group, Somali adults were forced to use oral literature to circumvent draconian censorship laws put in place by Barre's military junta. Poetry is best suited for this job. The poetic language makes use of figurative speech to attain its aims.

4.1. Abdulle Rage

Abdulle Rage Tarawil, a well-known Somali poet, was detained without charge or trial for four years. At the time of his arrest, in 1982, he was working at the Ministry of Information and National Guidance where he was responsible for the staging of theatre, dance and music events and the recording of official poetry. He was also a member of the Waberi Fan Club, a government organisation for Somali artists.

He had been accused of expressing anti-government opinions in his poetry, although the authorities had not explained the grounds for his detention nor charged him with any offence.

The following is an extract from one of his poems¹:

So long as you are living in luxury
while we are sleeping on the ground
and we are striking the drum for you out of fear
and you are living in peace, and we are in trouble
So long as personal interests take priority
over the needs of the people
and we are forced to be refugees in foreign countries
like escaped offenders
I am not going to compose a poem

The poet Abdulle Rage Tarawil was detained simply because of expressing his feelings in his poems. He was held under the Preventive Detention Law of 1979, which provided for the unlimited detention of suspected opponents of the government. He was being held in solitary confinement in the National Security Services regional prison in Mogadishu, known as *Godka* 'the Hole'.

Refusing to compose was one possible reaction. Others continued to compose. Next in this paper, I will analyse some of the poems used for political debate and discourse during the continued rule of Siyad Barre. I will also examine the efficacy of the poems.

4.2. *Quman*, by Abdi Muhumud Amin

There is a Somali fictional story in which a young man rapes a girl. The girl calls for her mother to come and help. The girl's mother, *Quman*, hurries to help her daughter by beating up the man. The man shifts his criminal attention onto the mother. The girl, in turn, tried to defend her mother, by beating up the man with a stick. The mother said: 'Oh! My dear daughter, stop beating him, he is a man.' The mother's reaction surprises the girl. She bits her lips in anger and yells: 'So, mum, you were in need of him, you did not come to my rescue!'

With this fable, the poet alludes to how Siyad Barre and his cronies seized power. Barre's coup d'état, the poet suggests, amounts to rape. To the Somali people, in other words, Barre did not stage the October coup to save Somalia from the corruption and nepotism of the civilian governments he had overthrown. He had his own ulterior intentions for doing so.

The *Quman* poem goes like this (Somali original, alliteration: Q):

*Murti ay qumaamuro,
qiso ay kula baxeen
aan soo qaadanoo, kow dheh:*

*Wiil qooqay baa beri
gabar qoys korsanayeen
isago aan u amar qabin
oon qaadi loo gayn
xoog kaaga qalqaalsaday,
qaylo ku jiidoo
Quman hooyaday!
ninka iga qabo
habartiina qaar
qolka ku ogayd,
qabadiisay ninkii laba jeer
Yartu way u qalanto
baruurteeda qaar binu
bushimaha ka qoystee
intuu qaarkii kala kacay,
islaantii ku qalam yidhi
iyado qiyaastii
qaabkeeda moodo,
qiirrootay inantii
qool bay la boodoo,
ka qaad kolkay tidhi
qosol habartii laga reeb,
Hooyo, Qaali-Luuleey
anaa qalad sameeyo,*

*goodhe lama dilo
qamuunyootay inantii,
qawl waxaa ka soo baxay
illayn qaawintayiyoo
qalashada waraabaha,
qayla doon miciin biday
iigama aadan qabanine
adigaa hunguri qabay
qooq ku soo qaaday*

English interpretation with the alliteration in (the sound of) K:²

As a kernel of scholarly wisdom,
as a lesson let's count this story:

There was one day a cocky young man,
and a girl in a caring family raised
Without an authorised contract of marriage
nor in front of the qaadi he passed
He forced himself onto her, she cried out:
Quman my mother, chase him away!
And the mother reached for a cudgel
in her room and twice clubbed the man
The little one was quite becomingly round
He kept soaking his lips with her fat
then stood up and came onto the mother
which is the common pattern it seems
The girl was outraged and raised the club
But as she called out: Leave her be!
the mother cut her off with a smile:
Oh my Qaali-Luula, I made a mistake
One never ever clubs a male!
The girl caught her lips in anger
then uttered these words that I quote:
A cunning hyena stripping me naked,
slaughtering me, for help I cried out!
You came not to defend me from him!
You were craving and hot, like him!

As we have learnt, the Somali people, at the end of the 1960s, was tired of corruption, nepotism and misuse of power. Thus, people wanted to have social change and a change in the system of the civilian government. This cry and sentiment was sensed by the armed forces who felt that the people would support them in their coup.

The dream became real, with the full support by the people who saw the army as the national saviour. But, what happened was that the army led by Siyad Barre tasted the power and kept it for two decades, until the people sought another social change, which now has led them into a disastrous and devastating civil war.

From this perspective, Abdi Muhumud Amin explains in his poem *Quman* how the young girl (the power or the government) had been raped by the cocky young man (the army) when the society had cried for help.

4.3. Laangruuser, composed by Abdi Muhumud Amin and sang by Saada Ali Warsame

Somali version (G)	English interpretation (S)
<i>Waa maan gurracan</i>	It is a sickened mind
<i>Iyo garasho jaan</i>	Seeking evil wisdom
<i>Laangruuser gado</i>	To spend on a landcruiser
<i>Soo bari galley!</i>	And beg for seed and corn!
<i>Gacal iyo tolow!</i>	So my kinsmen and beloved
<i>Ma guddoonsateen?</i>	Do you collectively submit
<i>Baahida gudbane,</i>	To the spreading famine
<i>Gurigeenna taal,</i>	Come stalking our homes
<i>Innagoon ka guban.</i>	Out to makes us suffer.
<i>Gaadhii raaxaliyo</i>	Oh a car luxurious and sleek
<i>Laangruuser gado</i>	A landcruiser to spend on
<i>Guuxiisa mood,</i>	By the scream of its engine
<i>Gob inaad ku tahay.</i>	You suppose that you are free
<i>Geeska Afrikow!</i>	Oh sons of Africa's Horn!
<i>Waa maan gurracan</i>	It is a sickened mind
<i>Iyo garasho jaan</i>	Seeking evil wisdom
<i>Laangruuser gado</i>	To spend on a landcruiser
<i>Soo bari galley!</i>	And beg for seed and corn!
<i>Gacma hoorsiyo</i>	Stretch your begging hands
<i>Gunnimo u badheedh</i>	Surrender to be colonised
<i>Soo bari galley</i>	Beg for seed and corn
<i>Laangruuser gado</i>	Spend on a landcruiser
<i>Dhar qurxoon ku gedef!</i>	Dress up in splendid clothes!
<i>Sida gaari wacan</i>	Like a sweet good wife
<i>Barafuun ku goo!</i>	Spray yourself with perfume!
<i>Laangruuser gado</i>	Spend on a landcruiser
<i>Gurigoo mugdiya</i>	While darkness settles in
<i>Biyuhuna go'een</i>	No sip of water in the house
<i>Gabannadu jasheen!</i>	The children sleeping hungry!
<i>Soomaali u gaar</i>	Such stupidity's unique
<i>Iyo gooni tahay</i>	To Somalia right now
<i>Oo lagu gartaa</i>	Or so it would seem
<i>Guuxiisa mood</i>	By the scream of its engine
<i>Gob inaad ku tahay</i>	You suppose that you are free
<i>Geeska Afrikow</i>	Oh sons of Africa's Horn

Again, the poet explains how the military government who was called, in the beginning, the 'national saviour' of Somalia, had corrupted the national wealth, misused the power, buying expensive cars, building castles, depositing public funds in foreign countries, while the national development and the welfare of Somali people had been put aside. This is what the 'Landcruiser' poem points out.

A series of TV programmes entitled *Sirta Erayga*, 'The secrets of the word', was

broadcast by Djibouti Television (RTD) after the fall of dictator Siyad Barre. The series consists of 32 volumes and many Somali poets and playwrights participated, including women like Faduma Ahmed. Here, I just highlight three of the most famous ones: Abdi Muhumud Amin, Mohamed Ibrahim Warsame 'Hadraawi' and Mohamed Hashi Dhamac 'Gaariye', who demonstrated the secrets of the poems during the suppressive period of authoritarian dictatorship. The poets explained how they used the words in their poems in their different meanings, thanks to the depth of *sarbeeb* (idiomatic and allegorical) expressions in the Somali language. (RTD Art and Literature programmes on videotape).

However, although Somali poets expressed their feeling in a poetic form, their poetry was not allowed to circulate in the country. The poets were frequently detained because of their expression.

Abdi Muhumud Amin was arrested in Mogadishu on about 20 March 1990, in connection with the circulation in Somalia of a cassette recording of his Somali-language play, 'The Mouth Fails to Communicate'. He produced and also acted in the play at the National Theatre in Mogadishu in January 1990. Several members of the cast were arrested and interrogated by the National Security Service after the performance but were not held in custody. Parts of the play, particularly the poem 'Landcruiser' cited above, were evidently understood as indirectly critical of the government and angered President Mohamed Siyad Barre, before whom the play was performed.

Saada Ali Warsame is a great Somali woman singer who became a daredevil political activist against former dictator Mohamed Siyad Barre. She earned the title of heroine in 1990 when she risked her life by singing the famous and provocative song 'Landcruiser' in front of Siyad Barre himself.

4.4. Wallee Been Ma Qaayibo, by Mohamed Hashi Dhama 'Gaariye'

Somali version (Koor 1995:1)	English version
(alliteration: Q)	(alliteration: M)
<i>Wallee Been Ma Qaayibo</i>	'By God, I Do Not Model Myself on Lies'
<i>Qurus iyo tixaa gabay</i>	Many a poetic verse in praise
<i>Ku qaraabo uma baran,</i>	Of the master I refuse to learn
<i>Quudkaygu muu gelin</i>	My meals I would not have
<i>Qatanaha saboolka ah</i>	The poor must fast from poverty
<i>Dantodaan ku qumiya.</i>	It is their interests I make clear
<i>Hadba wiilka qooqane</i>	Even the young man, like a stud,
<i>Maalintaasi qoodha ah,</i>	Who that day is the very male
<i>Qushuuciisa ma akhriyo</i>	For me to admire him? No!
<i>Wayskala qabweynahay</i>	I am much superior to that,
<i>Qofna kabaha uma tiro!</i>	No one's muddy shoes do I shine!

This is an extract of the poet Gaariye's poem 'By God, I do not model myself on lies'. Many other similar ones explain how Somali poets and playwrights opposed the leaders of Somali authoritarian and socialist government, although they were working in a state-run organisation, the National Theatre, under the Ministry of Information and National Guidance. Poets were deeply interested in the common concerns of the nation, rather in than praising the leaders. There were some poets, though, who supported the government, especially those closely related to Siyad Barre, like Brig. Gen. Mohamed Nur 'Shareeco', who made a fortune for themselves in praising Barre and his policies.

4.5. *Yaasiinka*, by Abdi Muhumud Amin

In the following poem, the poet shows how the people became desperate because of the military regime, not being able to protest, nor being able to express their feelings publicly, or whoever attempted doing so never being seen again.

In this situation, people began to curse Siyad Barre and his regime in so many ways. The poets, as citizens sharing the feelings of the society, joined them. *Yaasiinka* 'Word the Yasin Sura' is an example. (RTD Art and Literature recordings)

Somali version (Y) English version (W)

Minii la yaabo, When in danger,
Yaasiinka! We word the Yasin Sura!

Waxaan ka yaabno, Whatever vexes us,
Yaxaas ha qaado, May the crocodile walk away with it,
Dabayl yulmaysa, May the whistling wind
Yuf ha siiso, Whirl away with it,
Yamays ha gayso, Whisk it off to Yamays,
Meel yaahuu That wicked well of curses!

Minii la yaabo, When in danger,
Yaasiinka! We word the Yasin Sura!

5. Conclusion

The years of misuse of political power has left its heritage. It is not, in fact, surprising to find the country falling into bit and piece or the so called 'independent authorities of lands' such as Somaliland, Puntland, Benadirland, Jubbaland, Hiranland, etc., as every group has in memory Barre's clandestine power and his nepotism, therefore, they try to copy the same model.

Lack of freedom of expression and free press opened the gate to corruption, injustice, nepotism, misuse of power, etc. The absence of free expression and press freedom together with many other crucial problems is the key factors of the current political crisis in Somalia. As emphasised earlier, a free press warns its fellow citizens against ruinous consequences.

The motto of this paper '*He, who has not been burnt with a fire, does not flee from its ashes*' should be kept in the memories of the Somali people, and other societies of similar experiences. They should keep keen eyes on what has driven this society into a fire, whose flames were lack of free expression, tribalism, nepotism, injustice, misuse of power and many others. They should not repeat these evil political behaviours, if they don't want to end up in a devastating, bloody civil war again.

Notes

¹ Abdulle Rage Tarawil's poem is well known among Somalis, but I have been unable to trace the origin of the translation. I apologize for not being able to acknowledge the source.

² This poem, *Quman*, and the following, *Laangruuser* 'Landcruiser', *Wallee been ma qaayibo* 'By God, I do not model myself on lies' and *Yaasiinka!* 'Word the Yasin Sura', have been interpreted into English by M.S. Lilius in close cooperation with A.M. Diesow.

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Audio Materials in the Possession of the Author

- ERC (Europe Recorded Cassette) /Mr. MX/Summer 1995. An interview that I have conducted with Mr. MX, a former NSS officer, living in Diaspora.
- LRC (London Recorded Cassette) /Du'ale/09.01.1996. An interview that I have conducted with Mohamoud Abdi Du'ale, former Head of Radio Mogadishu, a senior producer and broadcaster at BBC Somali Service at the present time.
- LRC (London Recorded Cassette) /Fadal/11.01.1996. An interview that I have conducted with Abdullahi Hassan Fadal (Sool), former SONNA staff and Deputy Director, now a producer and broadcaster at the BBC Somali Service.
- LRC (London Recorded Cassette) /Garaad /19.01.1996. An interview that I have conducted with Yusuf-Garaad Omar, a former October Star newspaper writer and Radio Mogadishu broadcaster. Now a producer and broadcaster at BBC Somali Service.
- LRC (London Recorded Cassette) /Nuh /19.01.1996. An interview that I have conducted with Aden Nuh Dule, a former Radio Mogadishu producer and broadcaster. Now also a producer and broadcaster at the BBC Somali Service.